Sri Guruvayur Yatra

Dwarka of Southern India



Lord Sri Krishna (or Sri Guruvayoorappan as the presiding Lord is known) at Guruvayur

Guruvayur, also called 'Dwarka of Southern India', houses the famous Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple. Guruvayur Sri Krishna, also affectionately called as "Sri Guruvayoorappan", the presiding deity, *was installed by Brihaspati and Vayu*. *Sri Guruvayoorappan is a four-armed form of Lord Krishna in standing posture with a chakra in the right hand, conchshell in the left, and mace and lotus flower in the other two. Lord Krishna displayed this form of His only twice during His appearance on earth: once to Arjuna just before the battle of Kuruksetra while speaking the Bhagavad-Gita, and once to His parents, Vasudeva and Devaki, at the time of His appearance in Mathura. This deity was worshipped by Vasudeva and Devaki in Dwarka. When Lord Krishna wanted to end His manifest pastimes on this planet, He entrusted His devoted friend Uddhava, to take good care of the Deity. Lord Krishna prophesied to Uddhava that at the end of His earthly*

sojourn, the island of Dwarka would be swept away by the sea, 7 days after He would leave. Lord instructed him to rescue this precious Deity which His parents had worshipped, and hand it over to Brihaspati, the spiritual master of the demigods who would come to him. After 7 days, the island submerged in the sea as foretold by Lord Krishna. Uddhava went sadly to the seashore and saw the Deity floating up and down on the waves far away in the sea. He begged the wind god Vayu to bring it closer to him. The wind wafted it gently to the shore and Uddhava picked it up lovingly and cradled it in his arms. As he was wondering how to contact the guru of the demigods, he found that Brihaspati himself was walking towards him. Uddhava told him the whole story of how Lord Krishna had instructed him and Brihaspati who knew everything agreed to take it and install it at some special place. He was sure that he would be given further instructions. Brihaspati asked Vayu to transport him through the air so that they could choose a perfect spot for the installation.

Carrying the precious Deity made of 'Patala Anjanam' in his hands, Brihaspati was carried across the sub-continent of India till they came almost to the sea shore to the spot where the present town of Guruvayur now stands. Looking down Brihaspati saw a beautiful lake filled with lotuses on the banks of which Lord Siva and Parvati were dancing. He was charmed by the sight and he requested Vayu to float him down. For some time he stood spell-bound by the dancing couple. When they had finished their divine dance, he prostrated to them and begged Siva to tell him of a perfect spot to install this Deity of Lord Krishna. Siva said that this was indeed the ideal place. He told him to build the temple right there at one end of the lake where he and Parvati had been dancing. He magnanimously said that he himself would take up residence at the other end of the lake which was known as Rudrathirta. During the course of time the lake dried up little by little and now only the temple tank adjoining the Guruvayur temple remains. The temple of Mammiyoor (derived from Mahima-yoor, i.e. "the place of glory"), to which Lord Siva shifted still exists. It is for this reason that a visit to Guruvayur is considered incomplete without visiting Mammiyoor temple. Guru and Vayu installed the deity in the temple built by Viswakarma, the architect of the demigods. He made it in such a way that on the day of Vishu (summer equinox) the first rays of the sun fall straight on lotus feet of Sri Krishna. As Guru and Vayu together founded the temple, the place came to be known as Guruvayurpur in accordance with Lord Siva's wish. The name was later shortened to Guruvayur (guru for Brihaspati and vayur for Vayu).

King Janamejaya, son of Maharaj Pariksit performed austere devotion for 4 months, as a penance for the killing innocent reptiles. Janamejaya, in order to avenge the death of his father Pariksit, brought about by the Naga chief Takshaka, performed the "Sarpa yajna" (snake sacrifice) in which thousands of innocent reptiles perished. As a result of their curse that befell him, he was afflicted with leprosy, which left him in utter despair. Sensing this, sage Dattatreya appeared before him with a remedy: 'Beg for mercy of Lord Krishna at Guruvayur'. Janamejaya asked about the glories of the Lord and the whereabouts of the place. In reply, the sage recounted from Narada Purana the pastime connected to this Deity. At the beginning of the Padma Kalpa, Lord Krishna gave this deity to Brahma, who could execute his task of Creation by worshipping the Lord in His deity form. In the Varaha Kalpa, Sutapa and Prishni, who had no children, prayed to Brahma for the gift of a son. Brahma gave them this deity to worship, and said that their desire for a child would soon be fulfilled. After worshiping this deity for some time, Lord Krishna offered them a benediction, and Sutapa and Prishni then requested Him to personally become their son. Thus, in three separate avatars (incarnations), Lord Krishna as Prishnigarbha, Vamana, and Krishna Himself, became their son. In each of the incarnations the deity also reappeared and was worshiped by Sutapa and Prishni. When Lord Krishna Himself appeared, this deity was worshiped by Vasudeva and Devaki in a temple in Dwarka for 100 years.

Moved by this hearing the glories of Guruvayur Sri Krishna, Janamejaya proceeded to Guruvayur temple where he observed austere devotion for 4 months. One night while asleep he felt the Lord's healing touch over his body and his pain was no more! He returned to his kingdom elated singing praises for the Lord.

Pracetas, the sons of Pracinabarhi, also came to Guruvayur to do penance to Lord Krishna. Sensing their desires, Lord Siva emerged out of the Rudra tirtha and spoke to them the "Rudra gita", a hymn in praise of Lord Krishna. Siva suggested them to chant it with all their heart to get their wishes fulfilled. The Pracetas won the favour of Lord Krishna after rigorous tapas for 10,000 years under the waters of Rudra tirtha chanting Rudra gita. Later they married and begot as their son Prajapati Daksha. More details are given in Srimad-Bhagavatam canto 4 chapter 30.

Guruvayur Sri Krishna temple, also known as "Bhooloka Vaikuntha", is one of the most enchanting and glorious temples in all of India. 'Krishna… Guruvayoorappa!!' You hear these words quite often in Kerala. Guruvayoorappan has a distinct place in every heart and every household. Many great devotees like Bilvamangala Thakur (the author of Sri Krishna Karnamrita), Poonthanam (an ardent devotee of Sri Guruvayoorappan), and others frequently visited the temple.

Guruvayur is 30 km from Thrissur and 80 km from Ernakulam (Kochi). His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Founder-acarya of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) came to Cochin (Kochi) on 20th August 1965 at the age of 69, on his voyage aboard a cargo ship, Jaladuta, to USA to fulfil the mission of his spiritual master Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura to establish the culture of Krishna Consciousness in the western world.

Temples in and around Guruvayur:

1. *Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple*
2. *Sri Parthasarathy Temple*
3. *Punnathur Kotta*
4. *Thiru Venkatachalapathy Temple*
5. *Nenmini Sri Balarama Temple*
6. *Mammiyoor Temple*
7. *Manganchira Vishnu Temple at Peruvallur*
8. *ISKCON Guruvayur (near Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple)*
9. *Poonthanam Sri Krishna Temple and Poonthanam Illam (65 km from Guruvayur)*
10. *ISKCON Kochi*

1. Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple

Guruvayur is the 4th biggest temple in India in terms of the number of devotees per day. More than 7 million pilgrims visit this Temple annually to have darshan of Sri Krishna. The temple schedule begins at 3 am with Nirmalaya darshan, followed by abhisheka. Temple is closed between 1pm and 4:30pm. Temple reopens at 4:30pm and continues until 10pm, when the Deity takes rest for the night. Throughout the day the elaborate worship of the Deity of Lord Krishna engages the temple priests and thousands of visitors in activities of Krishna consciousness. Accompanied by music and singing, the devotees daily offer hundreds of vegetarian dishes, colourful silks and other items of opulent clothing, jewelled ornaments, garlands of flowers, and even elephants as gifts to the Deity. During the mid-morning hours many wedding ceremonies take place, one after another. Devoted couples, believing that being married at the Guruvayur temple is a great blessing, come here from all over South India. In the evening, varieties of classical dance, such as Krishnattam and

Kathakali, are performed for the public. The dancers combine dance and drama to depict the pastimes of Lord Krishna. These dance traditions have existed in South India for thousands of years.

Evening procession: *The evening also brings the main event of the day: a Deity procession led by jewel and gold bedecked elephants, known as Siveli (derived from "Shri-Bali"). The beauty of the Deity and the grandeur of the elephants draws thousands of pilgrims to witness the procession each evening. Before the arrival of the Deity, elaborate preparations are made. Then, as the enthusiastic crowd stands expectant, the priests emerge from the Deity's chamber with the utsava deity of Lord Krishna on a golden throne, which is placed on the lead elephant. Surrounded by priests bearing multi-coloured umbrellas and varieties of fans, by musicians playing drums, cymbals, gongs, and trumpets, and by exuberant devotees chanting the holy names of the Lord - Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare | Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare || - the Deity is carried around the temple compound, illuminated by ten thousand oil lamps.*

After about 1 hour, with the circumambulation completed, the elephants return to the starting point and stand motionless while the Deity is brought down. Because the elephant procession is held every night of the year, the Guruvayur temple owns an elephant ranch, where 65 elephants are trained to perform ceremonial functions. In the history of the temple several elephants stand out as special. The outer ring of the temple was constructed by the great Zamorin King Manadeva Varma of Kozhikode, one of the celebrated devotees of Guruvayoorappan with traditional Kerala architecture. The temple worship is done by Nambudri Brahmins, who are expected to live within the temple precincts during their term of worship. Tulabharam is a common vow in which devotees weigh themselves on a balancing scale and donate to the Deity a quantity of an article equal in weight to their own body.

Krishnanattam*, the dance performance done in honour of Lord Krishna is one of the major offering to the Lord. Krishnanattam is an exclusive art-form, unique to Guruvayur temple, not performed elsewhere. The art-form is the predecessor of Kathakali, hence the costumes looks similar. Ten pastimes of Lord Krishna's life are adapted in this highly Sanskritzed dance-drama. The art-form was composed by Zamorin King H.H Maharaja Manadeva Varma in the 14th century, which later inspired the composition of Kerala's celebrated art-form Kathakali. Krishnaattam is performed daily in evenings throughout the year except in the monsoon month of July. Prior bookings are needed to have performances of the art-form in one's name and performances are done outside the temple, thus allowing anyone to watch the art-form.*

Chuttuvillakku or Lamp Illumination *around the temple is another important offering, done on every evening. The temple walls have mounted lamp posts all over and it is a treat to see the entire temple lighted up with lamps. Other major offerings to the Lord, which are returned back to the pilgrims are Paal Payasam (Milk Dessert), Bananas, Sugar, Avil (Flattened rice), Sandal balls, Butter and Unniappams (fried sweet banana balls). Some of the offerings are returned back to devotees only in evening, after the evening puja. At Guruvayur, whether on the days of great festivals or in the moments before the evening procession, when ten thousand oil lamps are being lit, the pilgrim naturally feels a growing desire to glorify the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Sri Krishna.*

5000 years have passed since the founding of the Guruvayur temple. During this time there have been many trials and tribulations. There were periods of royal patronage when Kings used to pay homage to the Deities by donating vast amounts of wealth. In those days the temple owned many smaller farming villages around Guruvayur, agricultural fields, vast herds of cows, and even 1,000 elephants. Then there were times when the

armies of the Tipu Sultan ravaged all of South India, burning, killing, and destroying the sacred shrines. But whatever the difficulties, by mercy of Sri Guruvayoorappan, the temple has managed to survive and again rise to glory.

Since India's independence from British rule in 1947, Guruvayur has not enjoyed the patronage of royalty, yet the temple has prospered and is presently one of the most popular in the country. The temple opens its door at 3 am to an already-anxiously awaiting crowd of several hundred pilgrims. The first event of the morning is called darshan, the waking of the deity. In the morning darshan the deity is bathed with scented waters, dressed in opulent clothing, and served a variety of delicious vegetarian foods. Throughout the day, there are other elaborate functions which include the offering of 1,000 coconuts and the lighting of oil lamps. Not a moment of the day slips away without there being some spectacular activity.



Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple

Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple

Entrance of Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple

Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple

Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple



Lord Guruvayoorappan (centre), daily elephant procession (left), Chuttuvilakku or Lamp Illumination around the temple (right)

Daily elephant procession at Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple

Daily elephant procession at Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple



Chuttuvilakku or Lamp Illumination around the temple

Chuttuvillakku is another important offering, done on every evening. The temple walls have mounted lamp posts all over and it is a treat to see the entire temple lighted up with lamps. Other major offerings to the Lord, which are returned back to the pilgrims are Paal Payasam (milk dessert), Bananas, Sugar, Avil (flattened rice), Sandal balls, Butter and Unniappams. Some of the offerings are returned back to devotees only in evening, after the evening puja.



Krishnanattam - the dance performance done in honour of Lord Krishna

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Children singing bhajans for pleasure of Lord Guruvayoorappan



Dance performance done in honour of Lord Krishna

Gajarajan Guruvayur Kesavan - The Elephant Devotee of Lord Guruvayur:

One of the most famous elephants serving Lord Guruvayur was Keshavan, also known as Gajaraja, or "king of the elephants." In January 1922, Valiya Raja (King) of Nilambur offered one of his 12 elephants to Lord Guruvayoorappan, as a fulfilment of his vow when he got back his entire property intact at the time of the Malabar Mutiny. Aged 10 years, elephant was named Keshavan. He was noble and kindly, yet mischievous. To remove his lunacy, he was given butter to eat which was first sanctified by the Melshanti (Head Priest), and then made to perform bhajan by attending all the three *Siveli* (temple functions). All this transformed him into an ideal Deity elephant.

He would bend his front legs only before those who held the Lord's *thidambu* (Deity) to enable them to climb on him. Others who held the umbrella, *alavattam* etc. had to climb by his behind legs. Very compassionate, he never harmed anybody. Even when he was inside and outside Guruvayur, he was not destructive; He would proceed to the temple, take a round and occupy his place. Once he was hurrying to the temple, disobeying the mahouts. Everybody in the area fled for fear of being trembled by it. Except a poor, helpless leper who could not run away and remained helpless on the path. As the people watched with fear, they were astonished when they saw that Kesavan had actually lifted the leper with his trunk, placed him safely in a corner, and proceeded straight to the temple.

In 1973, Kesavan was honoured with the title of *"Gajarajan" (King of elephants)* when the temple was for the first time, celebrating the golden Jubilee of the services of an elephant. Keshavan's unique devotion for his service at Guruvayur will not be forgotten. When Keshavan became the leading elephant in the temple herd, he would no longer tolerate another elephant's carrying the Deity. Once, when another elephant was selected to carry the Deity in procession, Keshavan became so disturbed that he attacked the other elephant and chased him away. Whenever Keshavan was to carry the Deity, he would demonstrate his great eagerness to perform his service by pulling at the chains that bound his feet.

For more than 50 years Keshavan served Lord Krishna at Guruvayur. During one festival, on the fateful day December 2nd, 1976 on the *Moksada Ekadasi* day, he became ill, just at the time of the Deity procession. His huge body began to tremble, and he was removed from the procession and taken to a nearby stable, where he fasted throughout the night. The next evening, when the conchshell blew to announce the appearance of the Deity, Keshavan bowed before the temple, and amid thousands of devotees chanting and playing on musical instruments, his soul departed from his body to attain the eternal realm of Vaikuntha. A 12 feet high concrete statue of the elephant Kesavan has been executed by the temple members at the spot in front of the Panchajanyam Rest House, a fitting memorial indeed for a unique devotee.



Gajarajan Guruvayur Kesavan: The Elephant Devotee of Lord Guruvayur



When pilgrims arrive at Guruvayur, they are reminded of Keshavan by his tusks and portrait displayed above the main entrance to the Deity chamber. And throughout the city many shops sell colourful paintings of Keshavan.



Guruvayur Kesavan's statue at Guruvayur

The Guruvayoor Devaswom has erected a life-size statue of Keshavan in its precincts as tribute to the services he rendered to the presiding deity of the temple.

2. Sri Parthasarathy Temple

The presiding deity of the Sri Parthasarathy Temple of Guruvayur is Lord Krishna, in the form of Parthasarathy (charioteer). It is that believed this glorious deity was the one worshiped by Queen Kunti Devi, mother of Pandavas. Adi Sankaracarya under the divine guidance of sage Narada discovered this Deity from the holy Ganges river. He then installed this deity at this very same place in Guruvayur. Later on, the temple, which was under the Naduvil Madom Swamiyar, came in to the hands of the Mallissery Mana. During the days of invasion of Tipu Sultan this temple which had its glorious past was forsaken by all for a very long time. It was in the year 1971 when the roof of the Sree Kovil of this temple gave way due to dilapidation. The temple remains, happened to be inspected by some local villagers and devotees. During the excavation they found this sacred Deity under the debris, Thidappally (kitchen), Chuttampalam (outer peripheral structure), outer wall and the Temple Tank. Devotees took up on themselves, the herculean task of resurrecting the Temple to its past glory and started renovation work in right earnest. The structure of this temple is in the shape of a chariot with the many horses. The huge fortifications of the temple are adorned with various paintings of the pastimes of Lord Krishna.

Sri Parthasarathy Temple at Guruvayur



Sri Parthasarathy Temple at Guruvayur



Festival time at Sri Parthasarathy Temple

3. Punnathur Kotta

Elephant sanctuary of Lord Guruvayoorappan

Sri Guruvayur Temple maintains a unique elephant sanctuary, the only one of its kind in the world and an incredibly captivating place. Punnathur Kotta is 5 km from Guruvayur temple and has about 65 elephants that serve Sri Guruvayoorappan. These elephants are the offerings of the devotees to the Lord. A large number of pilgrims and visit this fascinating spot every day. Punnathur Kotta is the ancient palace of the Punnathur Rajas, now in the possession of the Temple. It is a 10 acre compound which Temple purchased in 1975. All the elephants were shifted to the Punnathur Kotta in a grant procession lead by Gajarajan Kesavan. It is a delightful and unforgettable experience to visit Punnathur Kotta and listen to the stories of Lord Krishna's elephants from mahouts.



Lord Guruvayoorappan's elephants at Punnathur Kotta



Lord Guruvayoorappan's elephants at Punnathur Kotta

4. Thiru Venkatachalapathy Temple

Thiru Venkatachalapathy Temple is 1 km from famous Sri Krishna Temple, Guruvayur. The deity worshipped at this temple is the same Lord Venkateswara (Balaji or Venkatachalapathy) worshipped at the world famous Tirumala Temple in Andhra Pradesh. More than 1000 years ago, a sage from the Tirumala Temple came over to Guruvayur and wishing to establish a temple for his Lord Venkatachalapathy at Guruvayur where there is already a temple for Lord Sri Krishna. He sat by the side of the present temple tank, prayed for and obtained permission of the Lord for such a temple at Guruvayur and then established this temple after bringing an deity from Tirupati. The locality where this temple is situated is known as Thiruvenkidom from time immemorial.

During an invasion, this deity was mutilated. In 1974 some devotees arranged the *devaprasna* (astrological search) and came to know the real nature of the deity. The devotees then went to Tirumala, arranged a Deity from there, took it to all the temples in South India and finally brought to Thiruvenkidom. The reinstallation was done in June 1977 in a grand ceremony by the Thanthri of the Guruvayur temple and Periya Jeer Swami of Tirumala. Thus Lord Venkatachalapathy manifested Himself again at Thiruvenkidom. Now most of the devotees who come to Guruvayur have *darshan* of Lord Venkatachalapathy. About 600 years after the original installation of Lord Venkatachalapathy, a deity of Bhagavathy (Mother goddess) was also installed here. Mother goddess through her benign nature and generous blessings soon began to be worshipped as the ruling mother of the entire population. After the deity of Venkatachalapathy was mutilated, it was Mother's shrine which retained the tradition of this temple and was continued to be worshipped during this time. She was the refuge and

protector of all the devotees. After the reinstallation in 1977 this temple has regained its glories.

Thiru Venkatachalapathy Temple at Guruvayur

Thiru Venkatachalapathy Temple

Thiru Venkatachalapathy Temple





Thiru Venkatachalapathy



Thiru Venkatachalapathy



Mother Bhagavathy at Thiru Venkatachalapathy Temple

Thiru Venkatachalapathy Temple

Thiru Venkatachalapathy Temple

5. Nenmini Sri Balarama Temple

Nenmini is about 4 km from Sri Krishna Guruvayur temple. The main deity here is Lord Balarama.

Nenmini Sri Balarama Temple

Nenmini Sri Balarama Temple

Nenmini Sri Balarama Temple

Nenmini Sri Balarama Temple



Festival time at Nenmini Sri Balarama Temple



Festival time at Nenmini Sri Balarama Temple

6. Mammiyoor Temple

Mammiyoor temple or famously known as *Mammiyur Mahadeva Ksetram* is Lord Siva temple situated at a walkable distance from the famous Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple. The main deity is Lord Siva in the form of *Uma Maheswara*. As described in the pastime above, *carrying the precious Deity of Sri Krishna in his hands, Brihaspati was carried across the sub-continent of India till they came almost to the sea shore to the spot where the present town of Guruvayur now stands. Looking down Brihaspati saw a beautiful lake filled with lotuses on the banks of which Lord Siva and Parvati were dancing. He was charmed by the sight and he requested Vayu to float him down. For some time he stood spell-bound by the dancing couple. When they had finished their divine dance, he prostrated to them and begged Siva to tell him of a perfect spot to install this Deity of Lord Krishna. Siva said that this was indeed the ideal place. He told him to build the temple right there at one end of the lake where he and Parvati had been dancing. He magnanimously said that he himself would take up residence at the other end of the lake which was known as Rudra-thirta. During the course of time the lake dried up little by little and now only the temple tank adjoining the Guruvayur temple remains. The temple of Mammiyoor to which Lord Siva shifted still exists. It is for this reason that a visit to Guruvayur is considered incomplete without visiting Mammiyoor temple.*

Srimad-Bhagavatam Canto 12, chapter 13, verse 16 describes:

nimna-ganam yatha ganga devanam acyuto yatha
vaisnavanam yatha sambhuh purananam idam tatha

<u>*Translation:*</u>

Just as the Ganga is the greatest of all rivers, Lord Acyuta the supreme among deities and Lord Sambhu [Siva] the greatest of Vaisnavas, so Srimad-Bhagavatam is the greatest of all Puranas.

Lord Siva is the greatest devotee of Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Sri Krishna (vaisnavanam yatha sambhuh). Lord Siva is one of the twelve mahajanas as described in Srimad-Bhagavatam Canto 6, chapter 3, verses 20-21.

svayambhur naradah sambhuh kumarah kapilo manuh
prahlado janako bhismo balir vaiyasakir vayam
dvadasaite vijanimo dharmam bhagavatam bhatah
guhyam visuddham durbodham yam jnatvamrtam asnute

Translation:
Lord Brahma, Bhagavan Narada, Lord Siva, the four Kumaras, Lord Kapila [the son of Devahuti], Svayambhuva Manu, Prahlada Maharaja, Janaka Maharaja, Grandfather Bhisma, Bali Maharaja, Sukadeva Gosvami and I myself know the real religious principle. My dear servants, this transcendental religious principle, which is known as bhagavata-dharma, or surrender unto the Supreme Lord and love for Him, is uncontaminated by the material modes of nature. It is very confidential and difficult for ordinary human beings to understand, but if by chance one fortunately understands it, he is immediately liberated, and thus he returns home, back to Godhead.



Mammiyoor Temple at Guruvayur

7. Manganchira Vishnu Temple at Peruvallur

The presiding deity is Sri Krishna. The temple is in Peruvallur, in the Annakara village, 9 km from Guruvayur. It is in the Peruvallur-Trichur road.

Manganchira Vishnu Temple

Manganchira Vishnu Temple



Manganchira Vishnu Temple

8. ISKCON Guruvayur (near Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple)

ISKCON Guruvayur Temple is close to Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple on the West Nada. Temple has the Guest House facility. Address: Hare Krishna Land, Muthuvattoor - Guruvayur Road, West Nada, Guruvayur - 680101, Kerala.

ISKCON Guruvayur (near Guruvayur Sri Krishna Temple West Nada)

Their Lordships Sri Sri Jagannatha Baladeva Subhadra and Sri Sri Gaura Nitai

His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Founder-*acarya* of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

Guest House at ISKCON Guruvayur

9. Poonthanam Sri Krishna Temple and Poonthanam Illam



Poonthanam's house, locally known as Poonthanam Illam is 65 km from Guruvayur. It is situated on the Perinthalmanna - Nilamboor route at Kizhattoor, Perinthalmanna. Temple is close to the Angadippuram railway station on the Shoranur - Nilambur railway line.

Poonthanam (AD 1547-1640) was an ardent devotee of Lord Guruvayoorappan. His devotion to Lord Krishna was steeped in awe and reverence. He composed poems for the pleasure of the Lord. Poonthanam was the family name; his personal name is not known. He married at 20, but for a long time had no children. Poonthanam began to propitiate the Lord of Guruvayur. A son was born to him in 1586. He called for a celebration and everybody known was invited, but the child died an hour before the ceremony. By stoically absorbing the tragedy with a sense of reality, Poonthanam submitted himself to the will of Lord Guruvayoorappan and took His refuge.

Gradually Poonthanam become enlightened and self-realised. He was blessed with a glorious vision of the divine child Sri Krishna, inspiring him to sing the famous verse - *"While baby Krishna is dancing in our hearts, do I need another baby of my own?"* Poonthanam spent the rest of his life of 90 odd years reading the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and singing the Lord's glories in simple Malayalam. He composed *'Bahsakarnamritam'*, a devotional work. The *Anandakarnamritam* (dance of ecstasy) was his last contribution to devotional literature. Poonthanam's life is a fine illustration of how sufferings (*soka*) of pure devotee can result in a divine hymn (*sloka*).

Every month Poonthanam walked to Guruvayur from his home to take *darshan* of Sri Guruvayoorappan. As Poonthanam grew old, he found it very difficult to travel up to Guruvayur. Once he set out for Guruvayur to see his dearest Lord Krishna. But, after walking just a little distance, he felt extremely tired and had to abandon the trip. At this point, Poonthanam cried out to Guruvayoorappan lamenting his inability to meet Him. Immediately, he saw Sri Guruvayoorappan standing to his left side (*Idathu puram*).

Sri Guruvayoorappan blessed Poonthanam *"You need not walk all the way to Guruvayur temple - I will be personally present here to accept your worship. Construct a temple here and do your worship."* Accordingly, a temple was constructed at that place, very soon. Poonthanam eulogized this Deity in many of his works as *Vaamapuraadi-naatha* (Lord of the left side). At this temple, there is a marking on the ground to indicate the area where

Poonthanam offered his obeisances to Lord Krishna. The successors of Poonthanam Namboodiri gave this property to Guruvayur Devaswom.

Poonthanam Sri Krishna Temple on the Perinthalmanna - Nilamboor route at Kizhattoor, Perinthalmanna. Temple is close to the Angadippuram railway station on the Shoranur - Nilambur railway line.

Beautiful banana and coconut plantations near Poonthanam Sri Krishna Temple

Poonthanam Sri Krishna Temple

Poonthanam Sri Krishna Temple

Poonthanam Sri Krishna Temple

Pukkur (sacred pond) behind Poonthanam Sri Krishna Temple

Poonthanam Illam - the house of great devotee Poonthanam

Entrance to the house of great devotee Poonthanam

Poonthanam Illam - the house of great devotee Poonthanam

This is the exact spot from where Poonthanam departed to Vaikuntha

The exact spot from where Poonthanam departed to Vaikuntha

Sri Krishna deities at Poonthanam Illam



Beautiful surroundings near Poonthanam Sri Krishna Temple

The Lord as Mangattachan (The Ring story):
Poonthanam used to walk to his favourite temple of Guruvayur which was 65 km from his home to take *darshan* of Guruvayoorappan every month. The route to the temple was very desolate. Poonthanam was walking fast on that route. His mind was fully immersed in thoughts of Guruvayoorappan. Suddenly he found himself surrounded by robbers who started to hurt him verbally and physically. He gave them everything he had, the money and his gold ring. Still they were at him. They asked for the small packet he was clinging to. Poonthanam said it was only *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. The thieves were not convinced. Poonthanam did not want to part with the Bhagavatam, which was his whole treasure. Sensing danger, he closed his eyes and cried out for the Lord's help. The sweet scent of Vanamala, the garland worn by Sri Krishna, spread all around and he opened his eyes to see Mangattachan (the Minister of the Zamurin Raja) standing before him with his drawn sword drenched in blood. He also saw the bodies of the robbers around him. Relieved, Poonthanam cried out, "Krishna! Krishna! Your *lilas* are wonderful!" He took the ring off his finger and presented it to Mangattachan for his help.

The same night the main priest of the Guruvayur temple heard a voice in his dream saying, *"You will find a ring on the deity, give it to Poonthanam, who will come tomorrow"*. Sure enough, the priest saw a ring on the deity when he opened the Temple the next day. Shortly after, Poonthanam came for *darshan* and started his prayers. The priest came out and gave Poonthanam the ring and told him what happened. Poonthanam was flabbergasted to see the ring he had presented to Mangattachan the day before. It was Lord Guruvayoorappan who had come to the rescue of Poonthanam as Mangattachan.

Poonthanam rendition of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* attracts Lord Siva:
People loved Poonthanam for his beautiful *Srimad-Bhagavatam* discourses. There is a temple in North Kerala called Kottiyoor. The presiding deity in the temple is Lord Siva. The temple was kept open only for a few days in a year. There was no human activity in that place for the rest of the year. Once, Poonthanam reached the Kottiyoor temple and bathed

in the holy water. He worshiped the compassionate Lord Siva, felt happy and stayed there for a few days. He recited *Srimad-Bhagavatam* every day in front of the deity and hundreds of people listened to his sweet discourse on the wonderful pastime in the *10th Canto 60th chapter of Srimad-Bhagavatam* named, *"Lord Krishna Teases Queen Rukmini".* The Lord always plays a complete role in all the pastimes. Be as Parthasarathy, a dutiful son, a loving husband or a loyal friend, He plays the role immaculately. The Lord decides to play with a great devotee and His beloved wife Queen Rukmini. He playfully asks her why she wanted to marry the Lord when she had better choices like king Sisupala, Salva, Jarasandha, etc. Hearing this, Queen Rukmini faints and Lord consoles her. This is the gist of the chapter. Poonthanam finished reading this part of the chapter and kept the bookmark at the end of the chapter. Next day, to his surprise, he found the bookmark at the beginning of the same chapter. So Poonthanam read the same part for the second time. This was repeated for the rest of the days. It was the last day to close the temple for the year. Poonthanam finished the discourse and was returning from the temple with the other devotees, but somehow left the *Bhagavatam* in the temple. Having walked some distance, he remembered that he forgot to bring the *Bhagavatam*. He hurried back; crossed the river and reached the entrance to the temple, which was closed. He was all alone.

He could hear somebody reciting the same part of the chapter inside the temple. As he looked through the key hole, he saw Lord Siva reading from Poonthanam's *Bhagavatam*. Mother Parvati and other Bhoothaganas were listening, their eyes filled with tears of devotion. Poonthanam stood there and heard the recitation. In the end, Lord Siva asked Parvatidevi, *"Did you like the recitation?"* Parvathi replied, *"Yes, it was nice, but was not as good as Poonthanam's."* Lord Siva replied, *"Yes. That is true. I also like to hear Bhagavatam from Poonthanam. That is why I placed the bookmark again and again at the beginning of the same topic every day."* Hearing this, Poonthanam, who stood outside was shaken and uttered the holy name of Lord Krishna loudly. When he watched again, Lord Siva and Mother Parvati had disappeared.

Melpathur humbled:

The *Jnanapana* (means the song of wisdom) written in simple Malayalam is Poonthanam's greatest work. Melpathur Naryana Bhattadri was the most popular Sanskrit scholar of that time. Poonthanam showed the draft of his *Jnanapana* to Melpathur. Malayalam was not accepted in learned circles those days and Melpathur held Malayalam in contempt as he did not consider it equal to Sanskrit. He refused to see Poonthanam's work and told him blatantly to learn Sanskrit before writing. This hurt Poonthanam. Melpathur was composing *Narayaniyam* those days. When he came to offer 10 *slokas* (ten stanzas) before the Lord the next day, he could not utter a single word. A small boy, never seen before, presented himself and pointed out mistakes after mistakes in the *slokas* composed by Melpathur. After 10 mistakes in 10 *slokas*, Melpathur realized the divinity of the boy. He fell at the feet of the boy but He disappeared. A celestial voice rang out saying, *"Poonthanam's devotion is more pleasing to me than Melpathur's knowledge in Sanskrit grammar"*. Melpathur realized his mistake and asked Poonthanam to pardon him. He amended his arrogance by reading the works of Poonthanam.

A Helping Hand to the Devatas One night

Poonthanam had the following dream. A beautiful airplane landed in the courtyard of his house. The
Vishnu-duthas (celestial servants of Lord Krishna) had come to pick up Poonthanam to take him to Vaikuntha. Poonthanam received them properly. The Vishnu-duthas led him to the plane with due respect. That plane passed through many worlds and reached Vaikuntha. The celestials guided him throughout and Poonthanam got out of the plane. He saw many other *Vishnu-duthas* there who all had reached Lord's abode due to their intense *Bhakti-yoga*. Poonthanam offered obeisances to the divine place. As soon as he

reached the entrance two divine Gatekeepers with a humble bow received him. Poonthanam thought he was unfit to receive that kind of honours from them. But they said they were two plantain trees growing near the portico in Poonthanam’s house in their previous birth. They got to hear Poonthanam's *Srimad-Bhagavatam* recitation every day, which elevated them. So they respected Poonthanam as their Gurudeva. By this time Poonthanam woke up from his dream with exciting memories of Vaikuntha. When he went to the front yard he saw those two plantain trees had fallen on the ground.

The Ultimate Benediction, Vaikuntha!!!

Poonthanam was getting too old. He couldn't travel anymore. He remained at home and spent most of his time in reciting *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and meditation. He used to get visions of Lord Sri Krishna very often. But others couldn't understand what he was talking about. They thought he had become senile. One day Poonthanam said, *"The Vishnu-duthas are visiting our house tomorrow. So the whole house needs to be decorated with plantain trees.”* Poonthanam's servants thought he was going crazy. Still they completed all arrangements, as he instructed. Next morning, while Poonthanam was resting after meditation, he could see the plane coming to fetch him. Immediately he invited anyone who wanted to join him and to get ready to go as the plane had landed. All the villagers declined. Ultimately, only a maid who had been nursing his ailing wife asked for his permission to go with him. Poonthanam gladly agreed.

The Lord's partiality for Poonthanam:

Though Poonthanam and Melpathur were devotees of Lord Guruvayurappa, Poonthanam, a great poet, who wrote his verses in the vernacular, was famous for his *bhakti*, whereas Melpathur, an erudite scholar and great poet in Sanskrit, was known for his knowledge. The Lord was partial towards Poonthanam. Melpathur used to laugh at Poonthanam's Sanskrit reading and recitation. One day, Poonthanam was wrongly reciting "*Padmanabho Maraprabhu*", (*Vishnu Sahasranama: aprameyo-rsikesa-padmanabho-maraprabhu*), which means *“Lord of trees”* in Malayalam. Melpathur openly laughed at Poonthanam and corrected him saying, Padmanabha is not *Maraprabhu* (Lord of trees) but *Amaraprabhu* (which means Lord of immortals in Sanskrit). Immediately, there was celestial voice from the inner shrine, *"I am also Maraprabhu" (Lord of trees)*. Now there is a statue of "Maraprabhu" in the Srivalsam guest house (at the southern side of the temple), made of clay. It is the biggest clay deity in Asia.

The *Moolamantra* of Lord Maraprabhu (The Primal Chant):
Brahmanda Sarwaswavum Jeddhare vazhikkumee
Mara Amara Prabhuve Pranamikkam

"I worship the Lord Maraprabhu who carries the cosmic universe in his womb."



"Maraprabhu" - Lord of Trees
52 feet Maraprabhu at Srivalsam guest house near the southern side of Sri Guruvayur Temple

10. ISKCON Kochi

ISKCON centre of Kochi is located at Kaloor and has two extension centres at Thrippunithura and Muvattupuzha. Every Sunday, Bhajans, Arati and *Bhagavad-Gita* class is conducted at the centre. In addition to various celebrations at centre, public functions are also held for Janmastami, Narasimha Caturdasi, Gita Jayanthi. Srila Prabhupada's book distribution is arranged at different temples during the temple festivals. Damodara month is celebrated with Arati, Bhajans and Prasadam at various houses and temples in and around Kochi. The Gopal's School for Children conducts *Bhagavad-Gita* class for school children at the centres. Every year summer camp for school children is organised. During Gita Jayanthi month Gopal's School conducts *Bhagavad-Gita* recitation and Vedic Quiz contest.

Srila Prabhupada's Kochi Visit:
In 1965, at the age of 69, Srila Prabhupada started his voyage abroad a cargo ship to United States of America to fulfil the mission of his spiritual master Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. The mission was to establish the culture of Krishna Consciousness in the Western World. On Friday the 13th August 1965, the Jaladuta set sail from Calcutta. The ship sailed to Colombo and reached on 17th August. The rest is from Srila Prabhupada diary.

"We starting for Cochin at 6 p.m. The ship started at 7 p.m., the pilot being late in reaching the ship. It ran for the whole night and next day up to 3/30 p.m. and reached the coast of Cochin. The ship is standing on the coast of Cochin without entering the dock.

Friday 20: Today at (20/8/65) the captain arranged for a meeting on board the M/V Jaladuta on account of Janmastami day and I spoke for an hour on the philosophy and teachings of Lord Sri Krishna. All the officers attended the meeting and there was distribution of Prasadam. The matter was radiographed to Smt. Sumati Moraji in Bombay. The ship is stranded on the Arabian Sea about 4 miles away from the coast. We are in this position from 3/20 p.m. 20/8/65 to 9/30 a.m. on 22/8/65.

Sunday 22: At about 10 a.m. we are now in the dockyard of Cochin. The dock is peculiar because it is by nature full of small islands. Some of the islands are full with nice hutments formerly known as British Island. I saw my books from Bombay arrived in five cases and the agents loaded them on the ship at 4 p.m. on 22/8/65. The agent m/s Jairam & Sons kindly sent their car for my driving in the city. Out of the group of islands two big islands joined by an iron over-bridge are known as Cochin and Ernakulam. The iron over bridge was constructed by the Britishers very nicely along with railway lines. The railways line is extended up to the Port.

There are many flourishing foreign firms and banks. It is Sunday, the bazar was closed. I saw a peculiar kind of plantain available in this part of the country. The island known as Cochin is not an up to date city. The roads are like narrow lanes. The part of the city where the foreigners are residing are well situated. The buildings factories, etc. all big and well maintained. The Mohamedan quarters are separate from the Hindu quarters as usual in other Indian cities. The part known as Ernakulam is up to date. There is a nice park on the bank of the gulf and it is named Subhas Bose Park. It is good that Subhas Babu is popular in this part of the country. I saw the Kerala High Court and the public buildings, the High Court being situated in Ernakulam it appears that the city is capital of Kerala. This Official Bhadra 31 days 1887 Saka part of India resembles Bengal scenario and the city Ernakulam also Cochin appears to me like old Kalighat or Tollygunge area of Calcutta. The culture is Indian as usual."

50th Anniversary celebrations at Kochi: Srimad-Bhagavatam Release and memorial for Srila Prabhupada

More details: http://iskconcochin.com/50th-anniversary-of-srila-prabhupadas-kochi-visit/
Video highlights: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAWp9FLqZt0

Unveiling the Plaque that would mark the Srila Prabhupada Memorial spot in Kochi on the 50th Anniversary celebrations at Kochi

Hon. Minister K Babu releases *Srimad-Bhagavatam* in Malayalam.

Ecstatic chanting of Holy Names



Transcendentalists discussing Srila Prabhupada's pastimes during the "Jaladuta" harbour cruise

On the 11th Oct 2015 devotees had two special, large boats commissioned to carry more than a hundred devotees in memory of the Jaladuta Voyage of Srila Prabhupada with kirtan and speeches by the *sannyasis* on Srila Prabhupada's epic voyage. The cruise on the very waters that Srila Prabhupada sailed in, brought memories of the sacrifices that he made to bring Krishna Consciousness to the world of humanity.

Pastimes related to Guruvayur

Sankaracharya's Forced Halt:
Once, Adi Sankaracarya was travelling to Shringeri. While passing through Guruvayur, he smiled at the elaborate procession and tried to pass the temple without offering obeisances to the Lord. His movement interrupted the procession at the northwest corner. Soon, he fell unconscious in front of the elephant procession. When he recovered, he saw the Lord in His majesty. Realizing the cause of his fall, Sankaracharya prostrated before the Lord and tried to win His favour by chanting eight slokas in praise of Govinda, known as *Govinda Ashtakam*. The spot where Adi Sankara fell through the roof is marked at the north-western corner of the Guruvayur Temple.

Manjulalthara:
Manjula was a virtuous and devout girl belonging to the Variyar caste. Her service was making garlands for the Lord. Every night, she used to bring garlands for Guruvayoorappan. One day she was late and the temple got closed. She could only reach the banyan tree from where the elephant race starts during *Utsavam* or festival. She felt very guilty about it. She called Krishna and started singing prayers calling Lord Krishna very innocently. Her cheeks became wet with tears. Then Poonthanam, a devotee of the Lord, on his way back from the temple, saw her crying under the banyan tree. He comforted her and said she could place the garland on the stone at the foot of the banyan tree, since the Lord is everywhere. She was convinced, kept the garland there and went home satisfied. Next day morning, the Pujari removed all the garlands from Lord Guruvayoorappan, but one garland remained stuck. The devotees were puzzled but Poonthanam remembered the event of the night before. It was the garland which Manjula had placed on the stone at the foot of the banyan tree.

Poonthanam told the story to everyone and then the garland slipped from the deity. Devotees started chanting the name of the Lord and struggled to collect the flowers from the garland. Devotees went to the banyan tree to offer their obeisances. Since then, the banyan tree came to be known as *Manjulal thara*. Now a very beautiful deity of Garuda is there under the banyan tree.



Manjulalthara

Devotion of Nenmini Unni:
Once, a Nenmini Namboodiri was the priest at Guruvayur temple. There was only one priest those days. Since he had to go out in an emergency, he told his 12 year old son Unni to offer the *bhoga* to the Lord and left. At the prescribed time, his son offered *bhoga* (cooked rice) to the Lord and thought the Lord would eat the rice, but the deity did not move. Unni went outside and brought some salted mangoes and curd from the neighbourhood in the belief that the Lord likes food this way. He mixed the curd with rice and offered it again. But the deity still did not move. He coaxed and cajoled but the deity was unmoved. At this, he started crying and told the Lord his father would beat him. The Lord could not bear the suffering of His devotee anymore and suddenly the *bhoga* disappeared. The boy left the place happily. On seeing the empty plate, Variyar (person designated to take the Prasad) became angry with Unni, but Unni could not understand why. He told Variyar that Lord ate the rice with curd and salted mangoes. Unni's innocent reply made Variyar furious. On the *santhi's* (priest's) arrival, Variyar said the child had eaten the *Bhoga* himself and that he was concocting a story. Even though Unni stood his ground, his father could not believe it. When he raised his hands to beat him, he heard a celestial voice, *"I am the guilty one, Unni is innocent"*.

The Lord as Assistant Cook:
One day, a devotee wanted a feast to be held for the Lord with 100 measures of rice. In Guruvayur the intended offering to the Lord is to be prepared by the two Kizhsanthis (Cook priests). One of the Kizhsanthis was on sick leave. Mallisseri Namboodiri was worried and he spent a sleepless night pondering how to make the next day's arrangements. He could do nothing other than pray to the Lord chanting His name overnight. The next day, he went to the temple, looked around and was relieved to see that the Kizhsanthi who had been on leave had come back and was preparing the feast.

After completion of cooking, the Kizhsanthi went to *Rudra-tirtha* for a bath but did not return. He was not seen the next day also. *Pujari* sent a man to enquire about him. To his surprise, he learned that the Kizhsanthi had been bedridden ever since he went on leave. It was unbelievable but Mallisseri understood. It was the Lord Guruvayoorappan Himself who came and helped him.

Bilwamangalam's Visions:
Bilwamangalam's devotion and dedication towards Lord Guruvayoorappan was such that he could have visions of the Lord's Deity form wherever he went. Whenever he came to Guruvayur for *darshan*, the Lord granted him vision from the sanctum sanctorum (central shrine). One day he did not get the Lord's vision from there. He went around the temple in search of the Lord. The sound of tinkling of bells from the northern *chuttambalam* attracted him. He peeped in and saw *Unni Krishna* dancing there. From that day onwards, this place came to be known as *Nritham* (*Nrithappura* or dancing hall).

On another occasion, he could not see the Lord's vision in the central shrine. Later he found the Lord sitting amidst the *Marar* boys (drummer's boys) and sharing a feast with them, as the Lord was fond of the feast given to the *Marar* boys. It later became an important offering with the devotees.

A third time, he failed to have the Lord's vision in the central shrine. It was night and the *Krishnanattam* was being staged in the courtyard. The saint found Him on the stage. Since then, *Krishnanattam* came to be staged in the northern *bahyankana* (outer courtyard) instead of the eastern *bahyankana*. And it begins only when the central shrine is closed after the last *puja* at night.

The Fire and Renovation:
On November 30, 1970, a massive fire broke out in the temple. It began from the western chuttambalam and raged for 5 hours. But the Sreekovil (Altar), the Vigraha deity of Guruvayur, sub-shrines of Ganapathy, Sastha, Bhagavathy and flag-staff remained unaffected. People from all walks of life, irrespective of age, caste, creed and religion fought the fire, setting a glorious example of humanity. Later, the temple was rebuilt. The incident took place on November 29 during the season of *Ekadasivilakku*. On this day, Vilakku was celebrated on a grand scale and all the lamps in the Vilakkumatam were lit. After the *Siveli* procession, the function came to an end and the gates of the Gopuram were closed. Around 1.00am, somebody who lived near the western chuttambalam saw a blaze within the Temple. As word spread, a huge crowd of people, regardless of religious differences rushed to douse the fire. Later fire tenders arrived. The conflagration was controlled only by 5.30 am. Authorities had already removed valuables from the Altar. The Ganapathy deity, *Sastha* deity and the main deity of Lord Guruvayoorappan were shifted to Koothambalam and then to a safer place. The fire gutted the whole *chuttambalam*, the entire Vilakkumatam on the west, south and north. The *Chuttambalam* was only three yards off, but still the fire did not even touch dry flower garlands, which hung on the corner of the Sree Kovil altar.

Directions to reach Guruvayur:
By Air: Kochi (Cochin) airport is 80 km from Guruvayur and Kozhikode (Calicut) is 100 km away. Both are international airports with connecting flights to many domestic and international cities.

By Rail: Guruvayur has a railway station towards the east of the temple which is connected to the Chennai-Mangalore main line at Thrissur, 28 km away, where several Mail/Express trains to Chennai/Mumbai/Bengaluru/Delhi/Trivandrum halt.

Chavakkad Beach is 5 km from Guruvayur and is one of the serene and undisturbed of Kerala.

Guruvayur

Sri Ananta Padmanabha Swamy Temple at Trivandrum:
www.dandavats.com/?p=16066

Sri Adikeshava Temple at Thiruvattar: http://www.dandavats.com/?p=17635

ISKCON Kochi: http://iskconcochin.com/

Mayapur TV: http://Mayapur.tv / **Vrindavana TV:** http://Vrindavana.tv

Holy Pilgrimages: www.Holy-Pilgrimages.com / **Facebook:** www.facebook.com/HolyPilgrimages
Holy Dham: www.HolyDham.com

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